

Effectiveness of an Iron Supplementation Programme for Pregnant and Postpartum Women in Rural Bangladesh

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Objective: Compare the levels of anaemia in a population served by an iron supplementation programme with that in other rural populations in Bangladesh.

Methodology: Haemoglobin concentration was determined from a venous sample of blood using the HemoCue system for women during the postpartum period. Two hundred twenty women who delivered between June and August 1994 were examined: half of them at 2 weeks and 6 months after delivery, and the other half at 3 months and 9 months postpartum (mean of two values are presented). The Matlab MCH-FP intervention programme has been distributing iron/folic acid tablets to all pregnant and lactating women since 1974. Compliance was tested using a questionnaire. Laboratory results were compared with: (i) historical data: haematocrit levels taken in Matlab in 1975 from 2,445 women (converted to estimate haemoglobin levels by 0.33); and (ii) contemporary data: haemoglobin surveys conducted by the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI) in 1996 from non-pregnant married women aged less than 50 years using the HemoCue method. Criteria for non-anaemia in non-pregnant women was 12 g/dl Hb.

Results: The mean Hb levels (95% confidence interval; percentage below 12.0 g/dl) were as follows: (1) Matlab 1994: 12.9 (12.7-13.1) g/dl (23%); (2) Matlab 1975: 11.7 (11.7-11.8) g/dl, (60%); (3) IFPRI Manikganj: 12.0 (11.8-12.1) (47%); (4) IFPRI Mymensingh: 11.3 (11.1-11.5), 59%; (5) IFPRI Jessore: 11.9 (11.8-12.1), 44%. There were no significant differences in height and weight among the study populations. The Matlab 1994 had a significantly higher proportion of women aged less than 30 years. Compliance with iron/folic acid in this population was very high. The iron/folic acid distribution programme may have had an impact varying between 47 and 61% of reduction in the prevalence of anaemia, with an increase of 0.9 to 2.1 g/dl Hb concentration.

Conclusion: The low postpartum anaemia levels may be associated with an intensive iron/folic acid supplementation programme in Matlab.

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Use of Nutritional Surveillance Project to Monitor Factors that Determine Vitamin A Capsule Distribution

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Objective: Describe the determinants of vitamin A capsule distribution during the national vitamin A (VA) week.

Methodology: In April 1990, the Helen Keller International (HKI) and several partner organizations set up a nutritional surveillance project (NSP) in rural areas and selected urban slums. Information has been collected